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INDIVIDUALIZED AND BASAL PRIMARY READING PROGRAMS.

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A 3-YEAR STUDY OF THE RESULTS OF BASAL AND INDIVIDUALIZED READING PROGRAMS IN 14 FIRST-GRADE EXPERIMENTAL AND 14 CONTROL CLASSROOMS IN EIGHT SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN WISCONSIN IS PRESENTED. SUBJECTS INCLUDED 359 BOYS AND 349 GIRLS. ALL EXPERIMENTAL (INDIVIDUALIZED) CLASSES WERE PAIRED WITH CONTROL (BASAL) CLASSES EITHER IN THE SAME BUILDING OR IN THE SAME COMMUNITY AS A SOCIOECONOMIC CONTROL FACTOR. ALL CHILDREN REMAINED IN THE SAME TYPE OF PROGRAM DURING THE 3-YEAR PERIOD. A CONTINUOUS INSERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM, DIRECTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, WAS MAINTAINED FOR ALL PARTICIPATING TEACHERS OF BOTH GROUPS. ACCOMPLISHMENT WAS MEASURED OBJECTIVELY AT THE INITIATION OF THE STUDY AND AT THE CLOSE OF EACH YEAR DURING THE PERIOD. THE STUDY IS CONCERNED ONLY WITH TEST SCORES AND THE COMPARISON BETWEEN TOTAL GROUPS, WHICH WERE MATCHED INITALLY BY AGE, CLASS SIZE, LENGTH OF SCHOOL YEAR, AND PUPIL INTELLIGENCE. WARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING ARE INCLUDED IN THE STATEMENT OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY. TABLES ARE INCLUDED. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "ELEMENTARY ENGLISH," VOLUME 42, DECEMBER 1965. (MC)

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Individualized and Basal Primary Reading Programs*

Problem

In recent years, the development of a new approach to reading instruction in the elementary schools has gained considerable popularity among teachers who are looking for new ways to meet the individual needs of children. Labeled "individualized reading," this approach attempts to put emphasis on *individual* rather than *group* instruction; on reading trade books and a variety of materials selected by children rather than reading textbooks selected for children; and on learning skills while reading rather than learning skills in order to read.

A controversy has developed between those who support individualized reading programs and the adherents of basal reading programs as to which is the better way to teach reading. Individualized reading enthusiasts favor a plan which employs teacher-pupil conferences, flexible grouping, pupil-selected materials, and a highly individualized non-sequential order of presentation of reading skills. Advocates of basal reading programs endorse group instruction using carefully selected and prepared materials which assure the logical, sequential development of reading skills at the proper grade levels.

Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to study, under carefully defined and controlled conditions and for long duration, the various results of basic and individualized reading programs.

Formal hypotheses to be tested referred to comparisons of reading achievement scores, range of reading scores, oral reading ability, quantity of material read, self-direction, social adjustment, attitudes toward self, and parental attitudes toward reading programs. Only the results of standardized achievement scores will be reported here.

For the purpose of this research project, individualized reading was defined as a program which met the following four criteria:

1. Reading material is self-selected by the child with the general guidance of the teacher.
2. The instructional procedure is one-to-one, a teacher-pupil conference.
3. Grouping is flexible and focused on specific tasks for special youngsters at specific times.
4. There is a non-sequential skill development program.

Basal reading was defined as a program which met these criteria:

1. The reading material is pre-selected and is embodied in a basic series.
2. The instructional procedure is teacher-to-group.
3. Grouping is consistent over a period

*A summary of Lakeshore Curriculum Study Council's research report, "A Three-Year Longitudinal Study Comparing Individualized and Basal Reading Programs at the Primary Level: An Interim Report," February, 1965. [*See pages 921–5 in this issue for a critique of this study.*]

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of time, although individuals within a group may move to another group.

4. Skills are developed in a sequence suggested by the basal reader.

These definitions distinguished between experimental and control groups; other definitions of materials and instructional procedures provided consistency within groups.

Design

Large numbers of children, enrolled in public school classrooms, were studied during their first three school years. Fourteen first-grade experimental and fourteen first-grade control classrooms were located, all on a volunteer basis, in eight member school systems of the Lakeshore Curriculum Study Council which has its executive offices on the campus of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The eight school systems were Brown Deer, Cedarburg, Cudahy, Glendale, Oak Creek, South Milwaukee, West Allis, and Watertown. All experimental classes were paired with control classes located either in the same school building or in the same community in order to establish some control over possible socio-economic differences between school districts. All classes were grouped heterogeneously by the usual local administrative procedures, and a concerted effort was made to equalize class size as well as reading time periods and materials.

Each school committed its staff to a three-year period of study so that children who began in either reading program in first grade could remain in that program through third grade. A continuous in-service training program for both experimental and control groups was instituted for the three-year period. It included general meetings, workshops, planning sessions, consultant help, and classroom visitations, all under the helpful guidance of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Achievement and other status measures of the children were made at the beginning of the first year and at the ends of the first, second, and third years. Group tests, individual tests, rating scales, log books, sociograms, attitude scales, attendance records, and parent questionnaires were parts of the comprehensive data collecting program designed to obtain as much information as possible about each participant.

In the first grade, fourteen basal reading teachers had 177 boys and 166 girls in their classes, and individualized reading teachers had 182 boys and 183 girls. No new pupils were added to the study after this point. Although all classes experienced some changes in enrollment, initial groups were kept together wherever possible. Considerable loss in subjects came after the first grade largely because of transfers to parochial second grades. Basal reading classes the second year had 117 boys and 99 girls while individualized reading classes had 128 boys and 142 girls. By the end of the third grade, 80 girls and 77 boys had completed three years of basal reading instruction. In the individualized reading classes 97 boys and 107 girls remained.

Results

This study was concerned only with comparisons between total groups. Comparisons between teachers, between classes, and between schools or school systems were not planned for and were not made.

At the beginning of the study, no significant differences between groups existed with regard to age of pupils, class size, length of school year, or pupil intelligence as measured by the SRA Primary Mental Abilities Test, although the basal reader group, after a short time in first grade, had a significantly higher mean reading readiness score.

Table I

Mean I.Q. and SRA Reading Readiness Scores at the Beginning of First Grade

	Individualized	*Basal*
I.Q	108.63	109.00
Reading Readiness	254.5	258.1

At the end of first grade, the Metropolitan Achievement Test was administered to both groups. The individualized reading group performed significantly higher on all parts of that test, including word knowledge, word discrimination, reading comprehension, and arithmetic.

Table II

Mean Metropolitan Achievement Scores at the End of First Grade

	Individualized	*Basal*
Word Knowledge	30.12	28.18
Word Discrimination	29.55	28.33
Reading Comprehension	33.61	31.75
Arithmetic	51.72	49.36

At the end of the third grade, the Metropolitan Achievement Battery was again administered, using the appropriate form. The individualized reading group again scored significantly higher on all measures except the spelling test, including word knowledge, word discrimination, reading comprehension, language, arithmetic computation, and arithmetic problem solving.

Table III

Mean Metropolitan Achievement Scores at the End of Third Grade

	Individualized	*Basal*
Word Knowledge	35.1	33.9
Word Discrimination	28.2	27.3
Reading Comprehension	30.9	29.4
Spelling	30.4	30.0
Total Language	38.6	36.7
Arithmetic Computation	29.4	26.7
Arithmetic Problem Solving	21.3	19.3

In addition to the Metropolitan Test Battery, separate tests of reading and mental ability, published by Science Research Associates, were administered at the end of third grade. No significant difference was noted in intellectual ability scores on the Primary Mental Abilities Test. Significant differences were found, however, in favor of the individualized reading group on SRA tests of reading comprehension and reading vocabulary.

Table IV

Mean SRA Reading Achievement Scores at the End of Third Grade

	Individualized	*Basal*
Reading Comprehension	32.5	31.8
Reading Vocabulary	28.8	28.3

Clearly, the results of this study indicate that pupils in individualized reading classes can achieve at least as well, and perhaps even better, in those aspects of the reading program which are now measured by standardized tests, than pupils in basal reading programs. It may be, on the basis of this evidence, that teachers will take a new look at the possibilities of individualized reading programs. Even if accepted as being only "as good as" basal reader programs, the use of individualized reading techniques may open up new roads for the application of reading as a tool for learning, and free teachers from traditional fears as they become aware of new possibilities for the organization of classroom reading situations. Further, new confidence in the use of individualized instructional techniques may lead to their application in other aspects of teachers' classroom activities.

Perhaps the most obvious and heartening benefits of this study, as observed by the researchers, were the in-service activities which stimulated improvements on the part of classroom teachers who participated in the study. Teachers of both programs looked

(Continued on page 915)

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Individualized — *Continued from page 904*

at their work with new vision for improvement and, indeed, looked at reading programs not like their own with respect and tolerance for the differences which existed.

Results of this study, and the effort put into it, indicate that the research studies most profitable to local schools, in general, will be those in which teachers are personally involved and play an important role.

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